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A Conservative Superspy

ON THE surface the new boss of the Central Intelligence Agency is a most unlikely candidate for the job of superspy. He is a successful businessman, manufacturer and industrialist who built hundreds of ships for the government in World War II.

John A. McCone is also an old hand in dealing with sensitive and classified information. He headed the Atomic Energy Commission for three years and was an undersecretary of the Air Force under President Truman. He has a reputation for fast decisions and firm direction.

In a few days Mr. McCone will sit down with Allen Dulles, the man he replaces, to learn about his job. No one else could teach him because the CIA operates in an atmosphere of mystery. There is no public record of its size, its appropriation, its activities or its policies. No committee of Congress is its watchdog and its budget is not debated on Capitol Hill.

Secrecy is essential to an agency with a mission to pry into secrets of potential enemies, or even faithful allies.

But shouldn't there be, somewhere in the structure of government, some group responsible to the people who knows what goes on in CIA's guarded chamber?

Mr. McCone, the pillar of Los Angeles conservatism, may be the man to let a ray of light, even if only through a congressional committee sworn to secrecy, into this murky area of government. Something of the sort has been needed for a long time.

It should help him shoulder the heavy responsibility of his job in a time of national peril. As he prepares to take over in November when Mr. Dulles retires, the nation's security could hang on his success.